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SUBJECT: President Calderon Bolsters Ties with Guatemala in Oct 26-27 Visit

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In an October 26-27 visit to Guatemala, Mexican President Felipe Calderon discussed a number of initiatives with his Guatemalan counterpart, Alvaro Colom, to better control migration and enhance security along their shared border. The two leaders pledged to reinforce joint efforts to combat drug trafficking, organized crime, human trafficking, money laundering, and arms trafficking. President Calderon also proposed that the two states consider signing an agreement on intelligence sharing. Colom said he would study it. Other highlights of the visit included the joining of electrical grids between the two countries and the inauguration of a new road and model border crossing point linking Mexico's southern states of Tabasco and Chiapas to Peten, Guatemala's northernmost department. We will follow up with the Mexican Ambassador to assess the visit's impact on more sensitive counter-narcotics issues. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) President Calderon used the opportunity of his first official trip to Guatemala October 26-27 to discuss with President Colom two relatively new Mexican initiatives to better control migration: A) issuing a new border crossing card valid in four Mexican border states (Quintana Roo, Chiapas, Tabasco, and Campeche), and B) issuing a new work visa valid in the same areas. According to Mexican DCM Mario Puga, the new border crossing card, inspired by the one used on the U.S. - Mexico border, has replaced the previous, local border crossing passes which, he added, were "inexplicably" issued by Guatemalan authorities, rather than the Mexican National Migration Institute. The new border crossing cards have anti-counterfeiting protections including a chip with biometric data that allows the automated recording of movements across the border. These border crossing cards are currently only available to Guatemalans from departments bordering Mexico, but Calderon announced that some time during 2010 Mexico will extend the benefit to all Guatemalans. Currently there are 35,000 such cards in circulation. They are valid for travel up to 100 kms. and allow stays of up to three nights.

¶3. (SBU) The new work visa is intended to extend better state control over the movement of temporary Central American workers into southern Mexico, and distinguish them from other migrants seeking to make their way farther north. Like the border card, issuance of these new visas also began about eight months ago, and is part of a broader national strategy of strengthening controls at Mexico's southern isthmus - the narrowest portion of Mexico's southern territory that runs along a line north from the state of Oaxaca. With the new work visa, temporary workers will be free to move about southeast of the choke point.

¶4. (SBU) Guatemalan MFA Director General for Bilateral Affairs Carlos Raul Morales told Pol/Econ Counselor the two governments concur that exercising physical control over the entirety of the Mexican-Guatemalan border, much of which is covered by dense,

nearly impenetrable forest, is not a practical goal, so instead the two sides want to develop more intelligence on and exercise greater control over the people who cross the border. Morales added that the new border crossing cards fit within a broader Guatemalan effort to strengthen border controls, the "Integral Border Security Plan." The first manifestation of the new plan is the model border crossing installation under construction at El Ceibo, Peten, which the two presidents visited Oct. 27. El Ceibo will be the first of eight new model border crossing points designed to new specifications. The GOG selected these points because they coincide with the route of the planned Northern Transversal Highway.

15. (U) During the visit, the two presidents also inaugurated a 22-kilometer stretch of road connecting Guatemala's northernmost department of Peten with the Mexican states of Tabasco and Chiapas. The new road will facilitate movement of tourists between the Mayan ruin sites of Palenque, Mexico, and Tikal, Guatemala. Calderon and Colom also took time to inaugurate a new electrical power substation in the department of Retalhueu on the Pacific coast. The opening of the \$54 million substation links Mexico's electrical grid to Guatemala's through a 103 km-long transmission line between the two countries. Joining of the two grids is expected to provide Guatemala with about nine percent of its total electrical needs and additional surge capability, and is part of a larger regional scheme (Plan Puebla) to eventually link the electrical grids of Mexico, Central America, and Colombia. Finally, Calderon visited the department of Quiche, where Colom decorated the Mexican flag

with the Order of the Quetzal as a token of appreciation for the support Mexico showed to Guatemalan refugees during its armed internal conflict. An estimated 45,000 (mostly indigenous) Guatemalans sought refuge in Chiapas, Quintana Roo, and Campeche between 1954 and 1996.

16. (SBU) Before Calderon's departure, Guatemala offered to host the February 2010 counter-narcotics summit in which Panama, Mexico, Colombia, and Guatemala will participate. (This will be the second such summit by the four countries; the first was held in Colombia.) According to Mexican DCM Puga, Mexico will likely support Guatemala's offer, and anticipates Panama and Colombia will agree.

17. (SBU) Comment: The discussions the two presidents had about controlling migration through the use of biometric border crossing cards and regional work visas are noteworthy, as are those they had on enhancing border security through the construction of model border stations and the possible exchange of criminal databases. The border between Guatemala and Mexico is porous and continues to be used by illicit traffickers of all kinds. End Comment.  
McFarland